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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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LIMDIS

FOL REPEAT MANAGUA 3896 SENT ACTION SECSTATE OCT 7

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S E C R E T MANAGUA 3896

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NU

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S VIEWS ON PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT

OMAR TORRIJOS

1. IN A SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS PRESIDENT

SOMOZA HAS EXPRESSED HIS VIEWS ON THE LEADERS OF NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. THE COMPOSITE PORTRAIT OF PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT OMAR TORRIJOS THAT HAS EMERGED FROM THESE DISCUSSIONS MAY BE OF SOME INTEREST BECAUSE CT S BASED ON RELATIVELY FREQUENT PERSONAL CONTACT AND DEALINGS WITH PRESIDENT TORRIJOS OVER A PROLONGED PERIOD OF TIME.

2. PRESIDENT SOMOZA TOLD ME THAT TORRIJOS IS A MAN OF NO FIXED IDEOLOGY WHO HAS SEIZED ON THE NATION OF NON-ALIGNMENT AS A MEANS

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OF REDUCING U.S. INFLUENCE IN PANAMA AND GAINING BARGAINING

LEVERAGE WITH THE UNITED STATES. HIS EXCESSIVE AMBITION LEADS HIM TO TAKE ON MORE TASKS THAT HE CAN HANDLE EFFECTIVELY. HE IS SOMETIMES VERY AUDACIOUS AND INDISCREET BECAUSE OF HIS LACK OF SELF-RESTRAINT. AS THE PRESIDENT PUT IT "HE IS LIKE A BOXER THROWING WILD PUNCHES ALL OVER THE PLACE".

3. HE HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE UNRELIABLE AND UNSCRUPULOUS ON MANY OCCASIONS. PRESIDENT SOMOZA MENTIONED TORRIJOS' PARTICIPATION IN OPEB AS AN EXAMPLE. TORRIJOS ARGUED STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF A BANAMA TAX BY ALL BANANA PRODUCING COUNTRIES IN THE AREA, THEN ALLEGEDLY TURNED AROUND AND FAILED TO COLLECT THE TAX FROM THE BANANA COMPANY. THE FUNDS WERE HELD IN ESCROW BY THE COMPANY. TORRIJOS SIMPLY DECIDED NOT TO LIVE UP TO THE AGREEMENT WITH THE OTHER BANANA PRODUCING COUNTRIES. MOREOVER, THE PRESIDENT TOLD ME THAT HE HAS TRIED TO DO BUSINESS WITH TORRIJOS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN RECENT YEARS BUT THAT HE CAN'T BE TRUSTED TO KEEP HIS PART OF THE BARGAIN. HE CITED THE BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT BETWEEN PANAMA AND NICARAGUA. WHENEVER IT DIDN'T SUIT TORRIJOS, HE SIMPLY REFUSED TO HONOR THE AGREEMENT. PRESIDENT SOMOZA COMPLAINED THAT TORRIJOS HAS SHOWN THAT HE IS NOT GRATEFUL FOR FAVORS RECEIVED. FURTHERMORE, SOMOZA DISTRUSTED TORRIJOS' JUDGMENT AND SAID THAT TORRIJOS SUPPORTED HALF-BAKED IDEAS SUCH AS OPEB BECAUSE HE DOES NOT ANALYZE SITUATIONS CAREFULLY AND OBJECTIVELY.

4. PRESIDENT SOMOZA SAID THAT TORRIJOS HAD BOXED HIMSELF INTO A CORNER ON THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. HE IS BEING PURSUED BY THE RADICAL STUDENTS AND OTHERS TO USE VIOLENT CONFRONTATION TACTICS AGAINST THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION KNOWING FULL WELL THAT THE U.S. CONGRESS IS NOT GOING TO ACT ON ANY NEW TREATY UNTIL AFTER THE 1976 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THIS HAS CREATED A VERY VOLATILE AND DANGEROUS SITUATION.

5. THE PRESIDENT BELIEVES THAT TORRIJOS NOW CONSIDERS NICARAGUA AS AN ENEMY. HE HAD BEEN INFORMED RECENTLY THAT TORRIJOS HAS DECLARED THAT HIS POLITICAL ACTIONS ARE INSPIRED BY MARX AND SANDINO. THE PRESIDENT INTERPRETED THAT TO MEAN THAT TORRIJOS WAS CONSIDERING THE ANTI-CAPITALIST PATH TO DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENT ANTI-IMPERIALISM AS THE ROUTE TO NATIONAL LIBERATION. HE FEARED
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THAT TORRIJOS WAS, CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY, PREPARING THE CLIMATE IN PANAMA FOR A VIOLENT CONFRONTATION WITH THE UNITED STATES. HE BELIEVED THAT THE RECENT STONING OF THE U.S. EMBASSY IN PANAMA WAS DONE WITH THE TACIT APPROVAL OF TORRIJOS BECAUSE IN A COUNTRY AS SMALL AS PANAMA, TORRIJOS MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT IT BEFOREHAND.

6. HE FRANKLY ADMITTED THAT HIS PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH TORRIJOS HAD

DETERIORATED IN RECENT YEARS, THAT HE DISAGREED WITH TORRIJOS' PRESSURE TACTICS IN DEALING WITH THE UNITED STATES, AND THAT HE DISLIKED HAVING THE CUBANS PRESENT NEARBY IN PANAMA. HE SAID THAT HE HAD GRADUALLY AND REGRETFULLY ARRIVED AT THE CONCLUSION THAT TORRIJOS IS AN UNRELIABLE, UNSCRUPULOUS AND UNSTABLE POLITICAL LEADER. HIS INITIAL IMPRESSION OF TORRIJOS AFTER HE HAD SEIZED POWER WAS THAT HE WOULD TURN OUT TO BE A SOLID AND STABLE LEADER. THIS JUDGMENT HAD BEEN DISPROVEN BY EXPERIENCE AND EVENTS.

7. THROUGHOUT OUR CONVERSATIONS THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS WERE PUNCTUATED WITH ANECDOTES AND EXAMPLES OF HIS PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH TORRIJOS THAT TENDED TO CONFIRM THE VIEWPOINTS SUMMARIZED ABOVE. PRESIDENT SOMOZA STRIKES ME AS BEING A GENERALLY SHREWD, ACCURATE OBSERVER OF MEN AND EVENTS. NEVERTHELESS, HIS ANALYSIS OF TORRIJOS' CHARACTER PROBABLY HAS BEEN COLORED TO SOME EXTENT BY THE UNHAPPY RECENT TURN IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT.
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